SUGGESTIONS FOR A THEORY OF RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT*

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PERHAPS the greatest want, under which the Science of Religion labours at the present day is that of a theory of development. Archaeology, Ethnology, and Anthropology have collected a large quantity of materials for the study of religion; these have been sifted, compared, and arranged; religious origins have been determined in some measure; beliefs have been classified into varying degrees of higher and lower; but the law according to which a belief, lower in the scale, grows into a higher one, is yet to be discovered. The Historical School, ever shy of speculation, is nearly satisfied with the description of facts, and the Theoretical School, unencumbered by inconvenient facts, offers conclusions which are over-weighted by *a priori* assumptions. It would appear that the former has no theories to offer, and that those advanced by the latter are abstract, empty, *jejune*. And the human mind is so constituted that it would accept any theory rather than none.

Properly to estimate the value of a true theory is indeed difficult. That a theory, if true, adds to our knowledge, and has value as such, is obvious enough. Apart from this, it has a certain practical importance. Wherever a thing is the result of a process, its full significance is understood only when the process itself is understood. In such a case the present interpenetrates with the past, nay, it is the transmutation of the past: its significance is derived from the process of which it is the culmination, and can be made clear only in reference to its context. A religious belief is no more an exception to this than a biological organism or a political institution. Who can understand, for instance, the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper, without any knowledge of its origin? The pious "Pagan"

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in the old story, who visited the church on the day set apart for the Holy Communion, came out with the idea that the worshippers were a set of cannibals trying to eat the flesh and drink the blood of their very Lord. What a different significance the Sacrament would have to him, if he had only known how it came to be instituted!

It is however in connection with current theological problems that the need for a theory of development is keenly felt. If the intellectual form, which belief in God has taken at the present day, could be characterised by one word, that word would be "immanence." Philosophers spin theories about it, theologians dogmatise on it, but very few tell us the full import of the term. Is God present in the whole world of experience? If so, how are we to decide the question of freedom, moral initiative, and the origin of evil? If He is present only in a part of the world, which is that part? Nature, says one; moral life, says another; reason, says the third. Whatever it be, how are we to reconcile the part where He is present with the part where He is not? Again, is immanence true in fact as well as in meaning? What, then, becomes of personality, divine and human? These questions are answered in diverse ways, and in the confusion of tongues, no voice is distinctly heard.

But in the light of a true theory, these and other problems can be seen in proper perspectives. In the first place, it will acquaint us with the Socio-psychological conditions of the origin of particular beliefs; and the knowledge of these conditions will enable us to formulate our questions precisely, and to see whether our answers are adequate enough. In the second place, it will disclose the principle underlying new formations; and when once this is grasped the application will not be difficult. In the third place, it will show that spiritual evolution has been going on in two divergent channels, the Moral and the Intellectual, the one culminating in the conception of Transcendence and the other in that Immanence. And as an important Corollary, it will place at our disposal the spiritual experiences of our ancestors. It will be surprising to many a mind, whose vision has been limited, hitherto, by huge racial, national, or religious blinkers, to be told that Immanence is not a new idea, peculiar to our age, that some of our fore-fathers had hopes and fears, aspirations and fulfilments, similiar to ours, and that ours is the same old question only presented in modern settings. Certainly it will be of advantage, if we can know how these questions were once asked and what answers were then given.

II.

The failure to discover a law of development is due, in part to the limitation imposed by facts themselves. The data hitherto collected—or one may be permitted to remark—attended to, consist of beliefs scattered in various communities, in different places, and in diverse periods. There is no continuity observable among these disparate elements. The task would be easier indeed, if we could catch beliefs in transitions and in an order of succession, in the life of one and the same community. Are these conditions fulfilled anywhere? "No country can be compared to India as offering opportunities for a real study of the genesis and growth of religion. . . What we can catch and study in India better than anywhere else, is, how religious thought and language arise, how they gain force, how from mind to mind, yet always retaining some point of contiguity they spread, changing their forms as they pass from mouth to mouth, with the springs from which they rose at first. I do not think therefore that I am exaggerating when I say that the sacred books of India offer for a study of religion in general, and particularly for the study of the origin and growth of religion, the same peculiar and unexpected advantages which the language of India, Sanskrit, has offered for the study of the origin and growth of human speech."[1]

Not the sacred books alone. Religious practices which originated in prehistoric times are still lingering in the outskirts of Indian Civilisation, and the observations of them will verify, and to some extent supplement, what is found in ancient books. "For whereas primitive paganism . . . has been utterly extinguished many centuries ago in Europe and through-out Western Asia, yet wherever and whenever we cross the border, or land on the shore of India, we may find going on before our very eyes things of which we read in ancient books. We seem to step suddenly out of the modern world of formal definite creeds back into the disorderly super-naturalism of pre-christian ages . . . we may still fancy that in looking over India we catch a reflection of classic polytheism."[2]

[1] Max Muller: *Origin of Religion,* p. 135.

[2] Lyall: *Asiatic Studies.* Part I., p. 303.

III.

To yield fruitful results our investigation should be pursued by a method altogether different from the usual ones. In the Science of Religion there are two methods in vogue, the Historical and the *a priori*. The former is confined to the discovery of facts as they are, and is not concerned with any theory about them. The latter starts with an initial assumption and proceeds to squeeze facts into a ready made frame-work; recalcitrant facts are either mutilated beyond recognition, or discarded altogether as useless. To enter into a criticism of either is not relevant to the purpose of the present enquiry, but it is necessary to point out that both are vitiated by one common defect. The advocates of these methods seem to be inspired by the belief that the only data necessary for the study of the origin and growth of religion is a set of religious ideas, to be critically collected by the one, and to be rationally connected by the other. It does not seem to have occurred to them that ideas do not explain themselves. A living mind casts the object of its religious experience in the intellectual mould, so to say, and the product is a religious idea; a ritual is the practical expression of the emotional attitude of the same mind towards the same object; both are subject to modifications in the course of spiritual experience; and relatively speaking they are more or less inert. To know how they arise and under what circumstances they become changed, it is necessary to go to the root of the experience itself, and to explore the mind to which they belong. And as religion is essentially a socio-psychological phenomenon, a theory of its development should be based on the nature of the Socio-psyche in its continuous evolution. If this is so, the method most adequate to the purpose is the Socio-psychological method.

This method is essentially scientific in character. It starts with the discovery of certain facts, and proceeds to extract from them their psychic significance. Out of the elements so extracted, it attempts to reconstruct the nature and the evolution of the Socio-psyche. Lastly, from the nature of the Socio-psyche, it makes the further attempt to discover the law of the genesis and growth of religious ideas. The resemblance between the Historical method, and the first part of our method is merely superficial, for the Historical method is interested in facts for their own sake, while the

Socio-psychological method is interested only in such facts as have a psychical significance.

The Socio-psyche is revealed only through its expressions. For the sake of clearness, these may be roughly distinguished as external and internal. The external expression consists of migration and settlement, of war and conquest, of agriculture, industry, and trade, of social, legal, and political organisations, in short of all those activities which are economical in character. The internal expression consists of language, of literature of various kinds, of religious and moral ideas and institutions, of arts, plastic and decorative, of music, of painting, of dancing. To collect the records of these facts should be our first task.

At this point we may be told that the ancient literature of India contains very little of history, and that, therefore, neither the changing forms assumed by the Socio-psyche in the course of its development, can be described clearly, nor its activities arranged in an order necessary for the reconstruction of an evolutionary process out of them. Granted, that the genius of India has so masked herself in mythological symbols, that it is difficult to read the lineaments of her features at any stage of her life; granted, further, that, in spite of all the questionings of historians, she has preserved a silence, inscrutable, puzzling, nay, oppressive; yet one may hold that the difficulty is only plausible, at any rate not insuperable. The sort of composite picture of ancient life which this literature portrays, should be sufficient for our purpose. It is not through facts, which can be collected exhaustively and dated with precision, but through those which are typical and illustrative of life in different periods, that we should attempt to lift the veil of mystery, by which the genius of India has shrouded her early life.

Our next task is to describe the nature of the Socio-psyche by the aid of its expressions. These expressions will reveal certain psychical characteristics. These would be nearly the same as might be arrived at by the analysis of the socio-psyche, if such a process were originally possible. Some of these characteristics will be of the same kind; for this reason they can be considered as forming one group; and in like manner, all of them can be disposed of in various groups. When two groups contain common or similar characteristics, they are to be placed side by side, as indicating an order of succession in the series; and it is in terms of these characteristics that the transitional stage between one group and another

is to be described. Each group, then, when the characteristics contained in it are synthesised, will give us a picture of the socio-psyche at one stage of the development, and by means of the series we can visualise the process of its growth. But in each group there will be one characteristic standing pre-eminently over others, a ruling quality, if it be so, which is foundational to the rest. In other words, the socio-psyche assumes, at every stage, a new phase, and there emerges also a fresh *dominant*. Any particular phase, its peculiar tone, its unique look, the motif immanent in it, and the fountain-spring of all its changes can be characterised only in terms of this *dominant*. All this would give us not only snapshots of the physiognomy of the socio-psyche as it changes from stage to stage, not only a clue to the principle of its structure, but also a general view of the process as a whole.

The method so far outlined, that is to say, so far as the first two stages are concerned, is not altogether new. Karl Lamprecht employed it for the first time; and though he has not given a systematic exposition of it, he has applied it, with great success, in his study of the growth of the German Nation. In the view of this Savant, the history of the German Nation, considered as a socio-psychological process, comprises five distinct stages, viz, the Symbolic, the Typical, the Conventional, the Individualistic, and the Subjectivistic.

Human nature, whether it be in the Teuton, or in the Anglo-Saxon, or in the Semite, or in the Indo-Aryan, remains the same in fundamentals; therefore the general psychological laws deduced from the life of one typical nation should hold good in other cases as well. So far, the method, as worked out by the German Historian, is adequate enough. But when it is applied to the Historian, of Religious thought, it requires amplification, by the inclusion in it of a further consideration of the experience of the Socio-psyche.

IV.

We should therefore try to discover, if possible, the genetic relation between the experience of the Socio-psyche and its religious ideas. On ultimate analysis, this experience is resolvable into two terms—contact with environments, and reaction on them. In normal conditions this process of stimulus-response goes on as a matter of course; and when it is interfered with, there arises an emotion. It may be that of fear, or that of anger, or that of any other kind

according as the interference is felt as a hindrance or as a help. In this case the object of the emotion is more or less a familiar one, and it is therefore apprehended very definitely. Such an experience is an every-day affair. But something extra-ordinary might happen. Suppose that the course of this usual life of the psyche is thwarted by something never experienced before, that is to say, by some agency, power, or force, which is as yet mysterious and unknown, what would happen? The Socio-psyche would double on itself, and its attention would be diverted from the object of the original activity to the new mysterious power. Not knowing whence or what this power is, it would wonder; not being able to control it, it would feel helpless; if the interference is unfriendly, it would fear; in this manner the complex emotion of awe would stir it to the very depths. If, on the other hand, the interference is felt as friendly, wonder and helplessness would be combined with gratitude, and there would arise the complex emotion of reverence. At a much later stage in the development of the Socio-psyche, the emotive agent might become an object of even adoration and love. The distinction between the old experience and the new lies in the fact that, while the first is directed towards the natural, the habitual, and the work-a-day object of the world, the second is directed towards something mysterious and super-natural. With the emergence of the experience of the psychically felt presence of the super-natural, the Socio-psyche has entered the path of religion. Religious experience then, is the result of the dissociation of normal experience, and it is distinguished by a deep emotion and the awareness of the presence of a mysterious power.

What is this power? It cannot be seen, nor is it tangible; it is elusive, and yet it is very real. Since it has been experienced along with natural objects, could it be behind them or within them? The problem is intriguing. Natural objects are envisaged with a view to get into touch with the elusive power, and this gives rise to what is miscalled Nature-religion. Meanwhile the Socio-psyche is impelled from within, and an attempt is made to get some notion of this hidden power. The only way open is to bring all normal experiences to bear on the problem, and thus to read the unknown in terms of the known. Among the known there is one object which occupies a pre-eminent position; it takes initiative, at times it thwarts normal activity, and it is also capable of becoming a friend or a foe; and this object is the human self. No wonder that from the earliest

times, God has been interpreted in terms of the self. There is much psychological truth in the formula that the idea of God, in any community, is the reflex of the idea of the self, prevalent in that community.

The form given to the idea, whether it be the idea of self or that of God, depends upon the organ of apprehension with which the psyche is endowed. At the Symbolic stage, it possesses only perceptual organs and self or God is understood only in physical terms; strictly speaking there is no idea at all at this stage. At the Typal Stage intellect is envolved and real ideation begins. There is no fresh organ involved at the Conventional and the Individualistic stages, the new experiences being apprehended only by the intellect. At the Subjectivistic stage the capacity for intuition is evolved, and along with it comes a different way of apprehending objects. In this manner the idea of God is seen to be the function of experience and of the organ by which experience is apprehended.

V.

In the preceding sections we gave a brief sketch of the Socio-Psychological method. Before applying it to investigate the religion of Ancient Aryans, it is necessary, in order to avoid all possible confusion and misunderstandings, to point out the limitations of this paper. Religion, considered as an objective matter of study, includes a conception of God as its most important element; further, it includes certainly, an idea of future life, probably some notion of the relation between God and man, possibly a view of human society, and perhaps also a theodicy. In addition to all this, some religions contain a belief in pre-existence, and some others an idea of incarnation. This paper is confined to the attempt to trace the origin and development of the idea of God, as contained in the sacred literature of India. This idea occupies the Central place in religion and it is the pivot on which all other religious ideas hang. The knowledge of the evolution of this idea is bound to throw light not only on the evolution of religion in general, but also on the growth of allied religious ideas.

The second limitation pertains to the choice between diverging lines of evolution. It was indicated, in a previous section that religious evolution has been going on in two divergent lines, the intellectual and the moral. At present our attempt is to trace the process, from its very beginning up to the point at which it diverges in two directions, and then to go along the line which leads to the

idea of immanence. The Psychological laws underlying this branch of religious evolution are the same as those underlying the moral branch which leads to the idea of transcendence. The culmination of the intellectual line would give us only an aspect of God; and if our idea should be concrete and complete, if such were possible, the idea of immanence should be reconciled, and, if necessary, synthesised with that of transcendence. But with this task we are not concerned for the present.

VI.

The Indo-European life of the Aryan People is lost in obscurity. Where they lived, whether it was in the North of Europe, or on the steppes of Southern Russia or in the fertile fields to the west of the Carpathians, is a question on which there does not seem to be any measure of unanimity among historians. But it is safe to infer, from certain known facts, that they formed a homogenous Community, just hovering on the borderland between the nomadic life and the agricultural. They tended the ox and the cow, they also raised corn; the patriarchal system was in vogue in their families; and their religion consisted in the worship of two nebulous objects the Earth and the Sky.

Exigencies of circumstances or the spirit of adventure, drove them gradually to the plateau of Iran; and after hard fights with the local inhabitants, they settled down to peaceful avocations. That there was a cultural relation between the ancient people of Mesopotamia and those who composed the Vedas, was evidenced by the German excavations at Boghaz-Koi and the famous letters from Tel elamarna.[3] It was left to Dr. Waddel to make the astounding discovery that the list of kings and seers mentioned in Sumerian inscriptions, is exactly the same as recorded in the Vedas, and that therefore, the Sumerians "were the long lost early Aryans in race speech and script."[4] The recent discovery of Sumerian seals on the banks of the Indus has placed the cope-stone on the theory so ably advocated by Dr. Waddel. The Sumerians were also known as the Phoenicians, and they called themselves by various other names—the Amorite, the Goth, and the Scyth.[5]

In their new Asiatic home they did not show any advance over

[3] Cambridge *History of Ancient India*, pp. 72 and 76.

[4] Waddel. *Sumerian Seals Deciphered*, p. i.

[5] Waddel. *Sumerian Seals Deciphered*, p. vii.

their earlier life. From the socio-psychological point of view, the Indo-European stage and the early Iranian stage should be taken together as constituting one stage in development, for the whole period is essentially one of symbolism. The Community remained homogenous; agriculture had slightly improved, trade had just commenced in the shape of barter; and the medium of exchange was still the corn. The most powerful man was elected king, and he represented the various activities of the community; in war he led the army, in time of peace he functioned as magistrate; and on ceremonial occasions he officiated as priest. The planning of houses and villages was based on symbolism,[6] and this is continued even to-day in India. Land belonged indirectly to the community; no man could retain it except when he happened to be a patriarch, and it could not be alienated either by gift or by sale. During festivals they drank hard; their favourite sports were hunting and chariot-racing; and their chief game was gambling, in which they would wager anything, even their children, their wives, and if necessary themselves.

The same psychic quality was revealed in their inner life. Marriage was the symbolic union between Soma (Moon) and the daughter of Surya (Sun). A legalistic symbolism took the place of morality; and the chief crimes were theft and robbery. There was no reasoning from premise to conclusion, but only analogical inference based on physical resemblances. There was neither precision, nor balance, nor proportion in the working of the mind; and no wonder prose was unknown. Poetry, the language of imagination, was the only medium of expression, and its metre was the symbolism of the rhythm of Physical movement. Alphabet was non-existent, and teaching was carried on from mouth to mouth.

Energy, adventure, and imagination glutted life; but there was no sense of personal worth, the individual being lost and merged in the community. Lamprecht's description of the psychic condition of the Germanic tribe in the last centuries before the birth of Christ, applies equally well to the Aryans on the Euphrates valley. That the former took a long time to develop the same quality as was present in the latter at a much earlier age, may be accounted for by the fact that, while these acquired new experiences due to migration, the other tribe remained home-keeping youths with their wits very much retarded in growth. "Their imagination, to begin with this

[6] Havel. *History of Aryan Rule in India*, pp. 22 to 32.

most symptomatic of all psychic functions, rich in accordance with the output of their strength, does not show itself in any poem, any drama, any musical composition, any piece of sculpture or painting. And yet it is active in the highest degree. It includes, at bottom, all the above-named kinds of imaginative activity at one and the same time; there was no song that was not accompanied by gesticulation and plastic pose of the body, as by a musical handling of the language; no solemn function that did not take a poetically musical form, no creation of plastic art in which mimic motives suggesting speech and modulation had not made themselves felt. . . . To them the world was not yet something conceivable, capable of portrayal, but only such as they saw before them, and hence the image of it in their mind was simple, palpable. No matter what important affair of life was dealt with psychically, it was not described in definite terms and made fast by convictions. It was reproduced allegorically, and its meaning repeated in psychic functions which expressed it externally by means of symbols."[7]

Our chief interest is in their religion. At the Indo-European stage, religion must have consisted, as we suggested already, in the feeling of a cosmic power, vague, nebulous, an all-enveloping mystery, a "blooming, buzzing, confusion."

This vague feeling differentiated itself into two, Deus and Nerthus. The former developed into the idea of Zeus in Greece, of Jupiter in Rome, and of Dyauspitar in India; and the latter pervaded the thought of all Indo-European tribes and became Prithvi in Hindustan. Nerthus-worship, as described by Tacitus, bears a genetic relation to the worship of Durga in India.[8]

These names are retained in language; but at the Iranic stage the experiences signified by them were further differentiated into what Max Muller called the semi-tangible and the intangible objects, —like rivers, mountains, trees, the earth, the wind and the storm on the one hand, and the Sun, the Moon, the stars, and the lightning, on the other. "The Gods were not personifications of light, or of the phenomena of nature, but the worship was directed towards primeval forces and potencies, behind which more or less vague personalities were seen. . . . Everywhere man had to reckon with such forces, everywhere he might be confronted with uncontrollable mystic power."[9] This is not animism for animism presupposes the

[7] Lamprecht; *What is History?* pp. 41 and 43.

[8] Sten Kenow; Article in Viswabharati Quarterly, July, 1925, p. iii.

[9] Sten Kenow; Article in Viswabharati Quarterly, July, 1925, p. 3.

distinction between spirit and matter, and there was no such distinction at the stage we are considering.

These objects were called Devas (The bright ones). A deva is not a deity, as most orientalists suppose; it is the stuff out of which a deity is manufactured at a later stage; and at best it can be translated only as a proto-deity. The History of the idea of God in the religion of the Indo-Aryans is but the history of the attempt to determine the real meaning of the term Deva.

Agni (fire) and Indra (rain) were the chief Devas. The attitude towards the Devas was rather strange; they could be propitiated by sacrifice, they could be coaxed into friendship, and they might even be coerced into submission.

Since the only organ of apprehension with which the psyche was endowed at this stage, was perception, two consequences were bound to follow. In the first place the Devas could be described only in physical terms. Indra was just rain, Marut was just the storm as felt, Surya was just the shining object, and so on with the rest. The force behind these exactly coincided with their physical appearances. Secondly, these objects could not be unified in any way. Perception has not the capacity to unify itself; perceptual experience is essentially pluralistic; and therefore perceived objects as such, remain loose, unconnected, unsynthesised. Hence the belief prevalent in certain quarters, that a Deva is a consciously conceived manifestation of the Absolute, does not accord with facts, and can be explained only as due to a confusion of thought. In this connection we may note the surprising fact that there is no fetish-worship in Indo-Aryan religion. This is easily explained. Perception being the test of the reality of the mystic power, the more precise and definite a perceived object is, the less the impulse to consider it as the home of mystery, and the more the tendency to discard it in favour of semi-perceived objects. What turn this process of elimination took and what it ultimately led to, we shall see in the sections that are to follow.

(To Be Continued.)